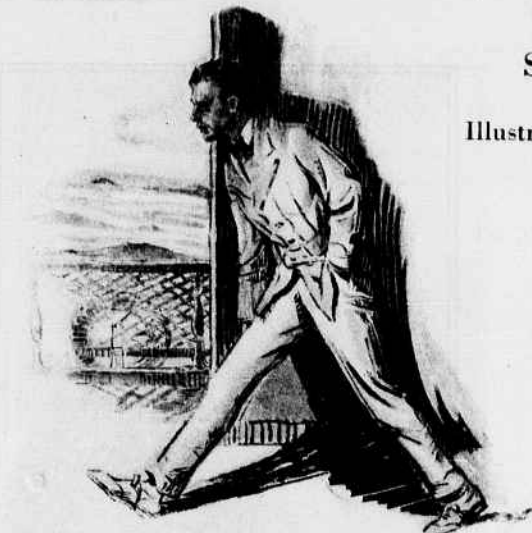


Torchy Hits the High Seas

By
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"When we leave New York behind, I'm feelin' rather low. I think a heap of that little old burg."



WELL, I got to take it all back—most of it, anyway. For, between you and me, this bein' a sea-going private sec ain't the worst that can happen. Not so far as I've seen.

What I'm most chesty over, though, is the fact that I've been through the wop and wiggle test without feedin' the fishes. You see, when the good yacht *Agnes* leaves Battery Park behind, slides down past Staten Island and the Hook, and out into the Ambrose Channel, I'm feelin' sort of low. I'd been lookin' our course up on the map, and, believe me, from where New York leaves off to where the tip end of Florida juts out into the Gulf Stream is some wide and watery jump. No places to get off at in between, so far as I can dope out. It's just a case of buttin' right out into the Atlantic and keepin' on and on.

We hadn't got past Scotland Lightship before the *Agnes* begins that monotonous heave-and-drop stunt. Course, it ain't any motion worth mentionin', but somehow it sort of surprises you to find that it keeps up so constant. It's up and down, up and down, steady as the tick of a clock; and every time you glance over the rail or through a porthole you see it's quite a ride you take. I didn't mind goin' up a bit; it's that blamed feelin' of bein' let down that's annoyin'.

For a while there I was more or less busy helping Old Hickory get his floating office straightened out and taking down a few code messages for the wireless man to send back to the general offices while we was still within easy strikin' distance. It was when I planted myself in a wicker chair 'way back by the stern, and begun watchin' that slow, regular lift and dip of the deck, that I felt this lump come in my throat and begun wonderin' what it was I'd had for lunch that I shouldn't. My head felt kind of mean too, sort of dull and throbby, and I expect I wasn't as ruddy in the face as I might have been.

THEN up comes Vee, lookin' as fresh and nifty as if she was just steppin' out on the Avenue; and before I can duck behind anything she's spotted me.

"Why, Torchy," says she, "you don't mean to say you're feeling badly already! Or is it because you're leaving New York?"

Then I saw my alibi. I sighs and gazes mushy back towards the land.

"I can't help it," says I. "I think a heap of that little old burg. It—it's been mother and father to me—all that sort of thing. I've hardly ever been away from it, you know, and I—I—" Here I smiles sad and makes a stab at swallowin' the lump.

"What a goose!" says Vee, but pats me soothin' on the shoulder. "Come, let's do a few turns around the deck."

"Thanks," says I, "but I guess I'd better

just sit here quiet and—and try to forget."

"Nonsense!" says Vee. "That's a silly way to act. Besides, you ought to tramp around and get the feel of the boat. You'll be noticing the motion if you don't."

"Pooh!" says I. "What this old boat does is beneath my notice. She's headed away from Broadway, that's all I know about her. But if you want some one to trail around the deck with, I'm ready. Only I ain't apt to be very cheerful, not for a while yet."

Say, that dope of Vee's about gettin' the feel of the boat was a good hunch. Once you get it in your legs the soggy feelin' under your vest begins to let up. Also your head clears. Why, inside of half an hour I'm steppin' out brisk with my chin up, breathin' in great chunks of salt air and meetin' that heave of the deck as natural as if I'd walked on rubber pavements all my life. After that, whenever I got to havin' any of them up and down sensations in the plumbin' department, I dashed for the open air and walked it down.

LUCKY I could, too; for about Friday afternoon we ran into some weather that was the real thing. It had been cloudy most of the mornin', with the wind makin' up, and around three o'clock there was whitecaps as far as you could see. Nothin' monotonous or reg'lar about the motion of the *Agnes* then. She'd lift up on one of them big waves like she was stretchin' her neck to see over the top; then, as it rolled under her, she'd tip to one side until it looked like she was tryin' to spill us, and she'd slide down into a soapsudsy hollow until she met a solid wall of green water.

"This is what we generally get off Hatteras," says Vee, who has shown up in a green oiled silk outfit and has joined me in a sheltered spot under the bridge. "Isn't it perfectly gorgeous?"

"It's all right for once," says I, "providin' it don't last too long. Every one below enjoyin' it, are they?"

"Oh, Auntie's been in her berth for hours," says Vee. "She never takes any chances. But Mrs. Mumford tried to sit up and crochet. Helma's trying to take care of her, and she can hardly hold her head up. They are both quite sure they're going to die at once. You should hear them taking on."

"How is it this don't get you too?" says I.

"I've always been a good sailor," says Vee. "And, anyway, a storm is too thrilling to waste the time being seasick. I always want to stay up around too, and repeat that little verse of Kipling's. You know—"

"When the cabin portholes are dark and green,

Because of the seas outside,
When the ship goes wop with a wiggle between,

And the cook falls into the soup tureen,
And the trunks begin to slide—

Doesn't that just describe it, though—that 'wop with a wiggle between'?"

"As good as a thousand feet of film," says I. "Kip must have had some of this fun himself. Here comes a wop for us. There! Great, eh?"

I hope I made it convincin'; but, as a matter of fact, I had to force the enthusiasm a bit.

Not that I was scared, exactly; but now and then, when the *Agnes* sidled downhill and buried the whole front end of her in a wave that looked like a side elevation of the Flatiron Building, I'd have a panicky thought as to whether sometime she wouldn't forget to come up again.

She never did, though. No matter how hard she was soused under, she'd shake it off with a shiver and go on climbin' up again patient.

There was several vacant chairs at the dinner-table, and when I finally crawled into my bunk about 9.30 I had to brace myself to keep from bein' slopped out on the floor.

I was wonderin' whether I'd be too sick to answer the shipwreck call when it came, and I tried to figure out how I'd feel bouncin' around on them sky-scraper waves draped in thin pajamas and a life-belt, until I must have dropped off to sleep.

And, take it from me, when I woke up and saw the good old sunshine streamin' in through the porthole, and discovered that I was still alive and had an appetite for breakfast, I was as thankful a private sec as ever tore open a pay envelop.

BY the time I got dressed and found that the *Agnes* was doin' only the gentle wallow act, with the wop and wiggle left out, I begun to get chesty. I decides that I'm some grand little sailor myself, and I looks around for a willin' ear that I can whisper the news into.

The only person on deck, though, is Captain Rupert Killam, who's pacin' up and down, lookin' mysterious, as usual.

"Well, Cap," says I. "Looked like it was goin' to be a little rough for a spell there last night, eh?"

"Rough?" says he. "Oh, we did have a little bobble off Hatteras—just a bobble."

"Huh!" says I. "I don't expect you'd admit anything's happenin' until a boat begins to turn flip-flops. Do you know, Rupert, there's times when you make me sad in the spine. Honest, now, you didn't invent the ocean, did you?"

But Rupert just stares haughty and walks off.

I've been afraid all along he didn't appreciate me; in fact, ever since he first showed up at the Corrugated, and I kidded him about his buried treasure tale, he's looked on me with a cold and suspicious eye.

Course, that's his specialty, workin' up suspicions. He's been at it right along, ever since the *Agnes* was tied loose from her pier; and outside of Auntie and Mr. Ellins, who are backin' this treasure hunt, I don't think there's a single party aboard that he hasn't given the sleuthy once-over to.

I understand he was dead set against takin' any outsiders along from the first, even protestin' against Mrs. Mumford and old Professor Leonidas Barr. I expect his merry little idea is that they might get their heads together, steal the map showin' where all that pirate gold is buried, murder the rest of us, and dig up the loot themselves. Something like that.

Anyway, Rupert is always snoopin' around, bobbin' out unexpected and pussy-footin' up behind you when you're talkin' to any one. I didn't notice his antics the first day or so, but

after that he sort of got on my nerves—specially after the weather quit actin' up and it come off warmer. Then folks got thicker on the rear deck. Mrs. Mumford with her crochet, Auntie with her correspondence pad, the Professor with his books, and so on, which was why me and Vee took to huntin' for little nooks where we could have private chats. You know how it is.

There was one place 'way up in the bow, between the big anchors, and another on the little boat-deck, right back of the bridge. But, just as we'd get nicely settled, we'd hear a creak-creak, and here would come Rupert nosing around.

"Lookin' for anybody special?" I'd ask him.

"Why—er—no," says Rupert. "Then you'll find 'em in the main saloon," says I, "two flights down. Mind your step."

But you couldn't discourage Captain Killam that way. Next time it would be the same old story.

"Of all the gutta-percha ears!" says I to Vee. "He must think we're plottin' something deep."

"Let's pretend we are," says Vee. "Or give him a steer that'll keep him busy, eh?" says I.

So you see it started innocent enough. I worked out the details durin' the night, and next mornin' my first move is to make the plant. First I hunts up Old Hickory's particular friend, J. Dudley Simms, him with the starey eyes and the twisted smile. For some reason or other, Rupert hadn't bothered him much. Too simple in the face, I expect.

But Dudley ain't half so simple as he looks or listens. In his own particular way he seems to be enjoyin' this yachtin' trip huge, just loafin' around elegant in his white flannels, smokin' cigarettes continual, soppin' up brandy-and-soda at reg'lar intervals, and entertainin' Mr. Ellins with his batty remarks.

The only thing that appears to bother Dudley at all about bein' cut off this way from the world in general is the lack of a stock ticker aboard. Seems he'd loaded up with a certain war baby before sailin', and while the deal wouldn't either make or break him, he had a sportin' interest in which way the market was waverin'.

"WELL, how do you guess Consolidated Munitions closed yesterday?" I asks. Dudley shakes his head mournful.

"I dreamed last night of seeing a flock of doves," says he. "That's a bad sign. I'd give a dollar for a glimpse at a mornin' paper."

"They say Charleston's only a couple hundred miles off there," says I. "If it wasn't so soggy walkin' I'd run in and get you one."

"No," says he; "you'd be late for breakfast. I wonder if our wireless man couldn't get in touch with some of the shore stations."

"Sure he could," says I, "but don't let on what stock you're pluggin' on. His name's Meyers. He's a hyphen, you know. And if he got wise to your havin' war-baby shares he'd likely hold out on you. But you might jolly him into gettin' it."

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"I'm strong for this yacht-cruisin' stuff. I don't care how long it lasts."